

Migratory Game Bird Advisory Committee Meeting, May 22, 2019

Horicon Education and Visitor Center, Horicon, WI

Attendance: Jason Fleener, Sara Comstock, Brenda Kelly, Brian Glenzinski, Greg Kidd, Mark Kakatsch, Paul Samerdyke, Taylor Finger, Josh Martinez, Bruce Ross, Rachel Samerdyke, Kyle Anderson, Drew Fowler

Guest attendance: Dave Kustersky (Ducks Unlimited Canada), Mike Buxton (Delta Waterfowl), Brad Heidel (Delta Waterfowl), Todd Burns (Delta Waterfowl), Peter Ziegler (Wisconsin Waterfowl Association)

- Committee members met for a field trip of the Horicon State Wildlife Area at 9:00 a.m. Paul Samerdyke covered the history and management of the Horicon Marsh, showed the DNR's airboat and Marsh Master stationed at Horicon and explained how they are used at Horicon and on other DNR properties.
- The committee meeting began at 11:00 a.m. in the Horicon Education Center auditorium. Introductions were given by those present, including committee members and guest attendees.
- Committee member agenda repair – Brian from DU gave a Waterfowl Stamp (WS) from partners.
 - Proposed fee increase update: only waterfowl and trout stamps are still in the bill. A surplus is perceived in budgets, when a majority of the stamp balance is actually already allocated to planned project work. Proposal is going forward to the Joint Finance Committee to increase WS from \$7 to \$12.
- Waterfowl management plan update (Taylor): The JV habitat goals have been tied into the plan and made realistic for Wisconsin. A health section and nuisance goose section have been added to the plan. Public comment period will be in July or August, then it will be brought to committees for another round of review, and from there it will be brought to NRB in September or October.
- Wisconsin Waterfowl habitat conservation strategy update: The plan is on schedule to be complete this year. Implementation will include: a report, maps, GIS data and it will all be available. This plan will help provide justification to implement other surveys not currently being done. The hopes are that this is a more fluid plan and it will include updates as necessary along the way, rather than letting it stay idle.

Comments and questions about the plan:

- Has there been a sensitivity analysis to see how much the ecological services provided influences the model overall? – Answer: No, but it could probably be done with the maps that UWSP has created. Changes in the overall mixed model are going to be very minor for any layers/maps that have lower weightings.
- Comment: Hunters may have push back when they see how hunter distribution is ranked. Reply: The fall migration model also implies hunter distribution (hunters go to where the ducks are) as well as the hunter distribution model, which provides additional emphasis on placing resources in areas where hunters go.

- Are there plans to check on the relevancy of the plan, updating needs, etc. in the future?
Answer: The WI JV Steering Committee will meet regularly in the future and have an opportunity to reflect on what is working well, identify areas of improvement and follow-up as needed.
 - What might the biological triggers for updating the plan be? Decline in a species, drought, new survey data, etc.
 - Should there be language in the plan about how do we want to go about this in the future?
Plan will be for 15 years to coincide with the JV Waterfowl Habitat Strategy, but the plan should be open to have different version/revisions with that 15-year timeframe.
- Canadian Habitat Applications – both applicants gave detailed presentations about the previous biennial accomplishments and the proposals for the new biennial. Mike Buxton presented on behalf of Delta and Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC), and Dave Kustersky presented on behalf of DU and DU Canada. The committee asked questions of the applicants and discussed various components of the proposed work. Jason will follow-up with the non-applicant committee members following the meeting to get input on funding recommendations by email following the meeting. Committee input will be used to formulate funding recommendations that will go to the DNR's Wildlife Leadership Team.

Delta Waterfowl

- What drives the higher cost/acre? That is the price MHHC is able to get the perpetual easements for.
- The properties that MHHC owns are open to public access. The properties with easements are not, but most landowners in this landscape are willing to allow hunting access if asked.

Ducks Unlimited Canada

- Do the easements contain public access? No, but most landowners are open to allowing access to hunters.
- An update on DNR Pittman-Robertson funded wetland projects was given. DNR's PR grant is from FY18-FY20. Approximately 25 wetland infrastructure projects are on the list to receive funding, with some projects already being completed. This was a special project proposed by DNR staff, but DNR is not anticipating a bump in PR funding lasting much longer to fund special projects like this in the future.
 - An overview of ongoing waterfowl stamp projects was given and recommendations for carry-over. Committee will be sent the spreadsheet after the meeting and feedback may be relayed on to the Wildlife Leadership Team regarding carry-over of projects. Overall, project managers have demonstrated good progress or have mentioned solid plans for moving forward. A couple projects will be closed out at the end of FY19 in which the goals have been met, but a small project balance remains which will be turned over to new projects.
 - FY20-21 WS applications

- Overall, approximately \$2 million of requests for in-state projects, but anticipating biennial budget will only be about \$600K.
- The four DNR districts were asked to rank their projects within the “major maintenance” category. Those rankings were provided in the spreadsheet for additional recommendation criteria by the committee. Overall, district feedback was almost on par with the committee rankings.
- Farm Bill Biologist Program – Funding approved by WLT
5-year agreement, this puts biologists on the ground to work on WRE sites. \$35,000/yr. from Duck Stamp and additional funding also contributed by Pheasant and Turkey Stamp programs. NRCS and PF are also contributing funding in the partnership.
- Grand River Dam Repairs – Overall project cost is estimated at approximately \$540,000, with additional functionality added to the design, which will improve safety, operability, and longevity.
FEMA and Wisconsin Emergency Management will only pay for up to 85% of the original dam design. “Mitigation” funding applied for which would cover further costs, but still waiting for final funding commitment by FEMA.
What if we reduce WS to \$100,000?
Concerns about the unsecure funding sources.
NRDA is unlikely contributor to project costs
Other potential funding sources within DNR that will be explored, including Seg and Stewardship funding.
Could apply for small NAWCA to leverage Duck Stamp contribution.
This property is important to fisheries, waterfowl and other programs, so why should WS be taking the brunt of this cost?
We need to remember that there are other sources of funding that will be sharing this cost.
Recommendation by committee to reduce Duck Stamp contribution to \$75,000.
- Jefferson Co Wetland Restorations – Recommendations to reduce to \$50,000
Recommended that projects should have been broken into 2 applications in the future.
We should maybe pay for 50% and let the manager pick the project that is most ready to go.
Proposed sites have not been evaluated thoroughly yet for feasibility.
- Leopold Wetland Management District – DU applied for funding to restore a wetland that would become part of a WPA. Recommended to reduce funding to \$65,000.
- Grand River Wetland Restoration – Recommended to fund. DU could be involved further to apply for a leverage small NAWCA funding.
- Wetland Restorations in Priority Focus Areas – WWA legacy program. Recommended to fund in full.

- Kylingstad Flowage Structure Replacement – Recommended to fund. Project tied with another infrastructure priority project within DNR's northern district, but this one was ranked higher through committee scores.
- Honey Island Flowage Renovation Phase I – Recommended to fund
Do we need to have completely gravel topped dikes? Is it a structural necessity or just an added cost? Brenda will follow-up with Mead staff to learn more.
There are offsetting benefits to having it. Some are bike paths, or public use.
Rip rap and dikes
- Mississippi River's Pierce Co Islands Backwater – Recommended to fund as proposed.
This is an opportunity to use excess sand and material to recreate lost land area. This project is expensive because of the need to move large quantities of sand (dredged material). USACOE will be funding 65% of project costs, but partners, including DNR, which is the project sponsor are required to provide the addition 35% cost-share. Minnesota DNR has already committed to providing 750,000 worth of match.
We haven't historically put a lot of WS \$ in the Mississippi River area, so this would be a good opportunity.
- Greenwing Dike Repair – Recommended to fund
Currently they can't utilize the impoundment due to inaccessibility. This proposal is sort of an insurance policy as other impoundments may fail around it.
- Riparian Wetlands – Recommended to fund
Restoration proposal for Token Creek and Sugar River. It looks like a good project. Dane Co has been increasing their attention on wetland restoration.
Could we route this to WWA to do only 1 agreement? Need to consult with county staff to determine how they want to handle the funding, agreements, and how they want to coordinate the work.
- Equipment Funding Issue – How or if to fund
DNR submitted applications for four pieces of equipment to be used across the state (two airboats and two Marsh Masters). DNR Wildlife Leadership is requesting committee to provide input on the use of WS funding on the equipment. Total equipment funding requests are over \$400K, so obviously WS can't fund 100%. DNR Leadership is exploring other eligible funding sources to cost-share equipment costs, but the eligible funding sources are limited, and there's no guarantee enough funding can be pooled with contributing funds to purchase all four pieces. Committee input needed on how much WS funding to contribute (if any), and how those funds should be distributed between four pieces of equipment.
 - Marsh Master for Crex –
It would be a great tool for managing wetland habitat in the northern region.
Should DNR Forestry be kicking in money if they use the equipment?

We should support equipment for our managers; we should come back to WLT, they should be talking to forestry or others to get cost sharing.

Forestry will only be pulling it for prescribed fire on wetland systems and upland barrens that provide nesting habitat.

Marsh masters specifically are one of the most useful tools for large wetland properties.

- Equipment Funding with WS – Points of consideration (pros and cons)
 - Focus would be for providing wetland habitat and usage would benefit waterfowl.
 - Equipment may occasionally be used for other purposes (e.g. access through wetlands for other management activities, boundary posting, search and rescue, etc.), but we need to remember that other funding sources would be contributing for most pieces of equipment.
 - Annual operational hours may seem relatively small, but habitat impacts and acres treated can be substantial. Long-term costs associated with capital acquisition would be more efficient and feasible than contracting work out or renting equipment.
 - Without tools such as these, DNR is very limited in its management capacity to optimally manage large wetland properties to maintain and improve waterfowl habitat.
 - Equipment would be used across multiple properties, but the number of trained and allowed operators would be limited. They would travel with the equipment from the home base.
 - Equipment purchases with stamp funding have been very limited in the past. This might set a precedent for the future.
 - Funding equipment with WS could be risky, as perceptions of constituents could lead to some negative feedback.
 - Recognize need for equipment, but is this the best funding source and use of WS funding?
 - Equipment funding would take away funding from habitat proposals, thus reducing the leveraging power of the WS.
- **Vote on equipment funding:**
 - Drew- yes use WS on equipment, up to \$100,000
 - Kyle- yes, up to \$100,000
 - bring to leadership, get at least 1 piece of equipment rather than none
 - Rachel S.- yes, up to \$25,000 for each marsh masters, \$15,000 for each air boat
 - Peter- no funding for equipment
 - Josh- yes, up to \$80,000-\$100,000
 - air boat would be most important 75%, we shouldn't be funding a large portion of marsh masters (25%)
 - Taylor- yes, \$100,000
 - spread across all 4
 - Paul- yes, no \$ amount

-we keep having this conversation but if managers don't have equipment we can't do anything, or it moves to who has equipment and is it available, or are contractors available

-Mark- yes, no \$ amount

-specific special use equipment doesn't come up often, leave it up to leadership

-Brian- yes, \$50,000

-put it towards highest priority piece

-Brenda- yes, \$50,000

-Crex marsh master is the highest priority

-Brenda would be willing to share their air boat if it means 1 piece of equipment can get funded.

-Greg- yes, \$50,000

-Jason- yes, \$50,000

-focusing dollars on one 1 piece may be better for communications purposes

-if Leadership can come up with other contributing funding sources to fund all four pieces, then the WS contribution doesn't need to be that high.

- Pool 10 Refuge, and Rice Lake Structure Replacement – Recommend not funding with WS. These projects have the potential to be funded with a Small NAWCA, as the Honey Island project and past funded WS projects at Mead can be used as match.
- Badger Merrilan wetland restoration – Recommendations to reduce to \$15,000. May not need that much \$ from WS. It would be used for NAWCA match. WWA will cooperate with FWS on the project. Seems like a good project.
- Wolf River Pool South – Recommend not funding. This may not be an urgent need. Work unit has a lot on their plate right now, also the water is high in the area making timing potentially more difficult.
- Necedah NWR DU 6 – Recommended to fund if funds are still available after year 1 of the biennium. This may be the “bubble” project if there are enough funds.
- Manoonmin (wild rice) Enhancement and restoration project – This was not proposed for funding 1 biennium in the past and there was kick back from WLT, there is benefit to waterfowl and wetlands, it is an important resource. We need to show that the State contributes to wild rice management to tribes, and in the past have used WS to show this. If not approved for WS funding, then another partner or funding source may need to step in. Recommendation to fund, but running down on WS money, potentially reduce to \$15,000 and shorten the list of sites on the contract. Ask WLT about their opinion to fund with WS

- All other WS proposals not discussed during the meeting will not be recommended for funding, unless they fall on the bubble according to the rankings for potential funding after budgets are re-evaluated after year 1 of the biennium and
- The committee was opened for any public comments to be made; none were made.
- The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.